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TAGS: PREL KMDR KPAL KWBG KPAO IS
SUBJECT: CORRECTED DATE: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/29): HOPES
FOR MITCHELL'S SUCCESS

Main Stories:

Top stories highlight the visit of U.S. Special Envoy Mitchell to the region and Israeli settlement activities. All front pages highlight and Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with lengthy quotes from statements by Special Envoy Mitchell from Cairo and Jerusalem. The papers note that Mitchell stated in Cairo on January 28, that the U.S. is grateful to Egypt for its efforts in realizing a ceasefire in Gaza. Al Ayyam also stresses that Mitchell reiterating "full U.S. commitment" to achieve a sustainable, stable peace in the Middle East. Al Quds and Al Ayyam highlight a January 28 Mitchell quote, after his meeting with Israeli Premier Olmert in Jerusalem, stating that Washington will sustain "active commitment" to realizing a two-state solution, while Al Hayat Al Jadida highlights Mitchell's call for consolidating the truce in Gaza. Al Hayat Al Jadida adds that Israeli Premier Olmert informed Mitchell that Israel will link the opening of Gaza crossings to the release of captured Israeli soldier Shalit. All front pages report that Special Envoy Mitchell will meet with Palestinian Authority President Abbas in Ramallah on January 29. All dailies run inside articles demanding that Special Envoy Mitchell begin his work by picking up where the 2001 Mitchell report left off: Calling for a halt to Israeli settlement activities. Al Hayat Al Jadida runs lengthy excerpts of the report on an inside page and comments that, as Mitchell begins his first regional tour, an Israeli Peace Now organization report reveals a 60% increase in Israeli West Bank and Jerusalem settlement activities in 2008. Another inside report in Al Ayyam notes that German Foreign Minister Frank Steinmeier expressed Germany's appreciation of U.S. engagement and efforts in the Middle East and invited Mitchell to Germany. On its editorial page, Al Quds runs a political cartoon showing Special Envoy Mitchell in three frames: In the first frame, Mitchell resolutely announces, "Sustained cease-fire!" In the

second frame, he announces, "Reopened Crossings!" In the third frame, a disappointed Mitchell sighs, "Nobody's listening." All front pages report the findings of a recent study by the Israeli organization, Peace Now, revealing that Israeli settlement activities increased by 60% in the West Bank and Jerusalem area in 2008. Al Ayyam leads with a photo of an Israeli bulldozer demolishing a Palestinian house "where 45 people lived" in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina, "with the construction of new houses in the Israeli settlement Pisgat Ze'ev appearing in the background..." Al Hayat Al Jadida leads with an oversized photo of, "Pisgat Ze'ev settlement that continuously expanded during 2008." In contrast, Al Quds' lead photo keeps the focus on humanitarian needs in Gaza, showing a young Palestinian girl, sitting next to a plastic container of water, watching a wood fire, "amidst the rubble of her destroyed house."

Israeli settlers organizing a rally in Tel Aviv is the subject of an AFP report on an inside page of Al Quds. The story notes that settlers, "mobilized against anticipated U.S. pressure" to halt Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and rallied against the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank.

Al Ayyam leads front page coverage with a January 28 statement by Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al promising in Doha the, "surprise establishment of a new authority to replace the PLO." Al Hayat Al Jadida front pages the news. According to Misha'al, the body will represent the Palestinians in the Palestinian Territories and abroad. Reporting also notes that Misha'al has sent a second letter to U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell stating that all military, security and political efforts will fail if they ignore the resistance." Both front pages run a linked article about Misha'al

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telling a French journalist "several times" in a France Presse interview last month, before "the war on Gaza," that Hamas is willing to recognize Israel within the 1967 borders. Meanwhile, Al Quds' front page reports that Hamas chief in Gaza Ismail Haniyah has sent a letter to President Obama urging him to, "avoid committing the same mistakes as the previous U.S. Administration."

All front pages headline statements made by Palestinian Authority President (PA) Abbas during a January 28 meeting with EU foreign policy chief Solana in Ramallah. Coverage quotes Abbas condemning the Israeli, "assault on our people [in Gaza]," adding that Israeli actions in Gaza are an obstacle to Palestinian reconciliation and the two-state solution. Abbas also condemned continued Israeli settlement activities stating that they prove that Israel does not want peace. Regarding the "war on Gaza," Abbas insisted that its aim was to divide the Palestinians, thereby preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. For his part, Solana confirmed that European humanitarian aid will be channeled through the PA. Solana also hinted at the possibility of the EU recognizing a Palestinian unity government under certain conditions. Finally, speaking at a press conference after the Abbas-Solana meeting, PA Premier Fayyad added that ensuring "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank is an important requirement in unifying the Palestinian Territories.

Al Hayat Al Jadida front pages, and all papers carry, a Reuters report on Gaza "citizens returning to work" in the Gaza-Egypt tunnels despite recent Israeli airstrikes. The article notes that repair to tunnels resumed within hours of the January 28 airstrike. The article appears next to a photo, taken after the strike, of a Palestinian working in the entrance to a tunnel near the Gaza border area of Rafah. In other U.S. foreign policy news, the front page of Al Ayyam runs a Reuters story about President Obama promising to make "difficult decisions" regarding Iraq and Iran. Meanwhile, Al Quds runs a AFP story on an inside page about Secretary Clinton "leaving her mark" during her first week of work, with the introduction of a new personal style and "smart diplomacy." Finally, Al Hayat Al Jadida reports on an inside page that U.S. Consul General Walles met with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas on January 28. Abbas discussed, "latest developments and PA efforts to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds editorial is titled, "We hope that Mitchell will be the last envoy to the region" (01/29): "Some are optimistic about Mitchell's tour for two reasons: First, he doesn't have stereotyped ideas or positions, and he isn't one of the extremists who had influence in the previous U.S. Administration. Thus, he could be more objective than others. Second, Mitchell arrives in the region just a few days after the inauguration of President Obama, and [Mitchell] is the first [in the new U.S. administration] to be sent [abroad], which indicates special [U.S.] interest in the region... If President Obama says, "judge me by my actions, not my words," then this [new maxim] is evident in the new U.S. envoy's travel to our region. Things are neither complicated, nor new, nor vague. Rather, they are extremely clear: Israeli withdrawal in exchange for peace and the Arab proposal, provide full answers to all questions. They provide a historic opportunity to achieve peace in the region. In addition to the proposal, there are the Road Map and Mitchell's own diary on settlements and violence, Annapolis, etc. and a long list of other proposals and ideas, all of which have not been implemented for one simple reason - Israel does not want to... We hope that the newly-arrived will be the last envoy... because we

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call for actions not words."

3) Basim Abu Sumaya opines in Al Hayat Al Jadida under the title, "George Mitchell" (01/29): "All the American envoy has to do, [keeping in mind that] he is an expert in Palestinian and Israeli affairs and was blasted by the Israelis following his report... is to pick up from where negotiations ended, meaning, go into the details of the issues... according to the vision of President Obama not that of [Obama's] predecessor... We are looking for a practical tour not a fact finding tour... Mitchell should not go home before compiling a new report that includes [suggestions] for the peace process to move forward and the resumption of real negotiations."

WALLES